

**Active Blog**  
**Excel Trick**

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**Graphs That POP Your Point**

You know the saying: "A picture is worth a thousand words." In most cases, an appropriate pictorial representation of data can be even more valuable than the actual data since it can help a manager spot trends that might otherwise go unnoticed. As such, graphs can go a long way toward helping a business make better decisions about the future.

In this article, we will use a budget spreadsheet example, and also a data set that lends itself to specific graph types.

**The reason**

Excel provides a lot of ways to organize and present data. However, when it comes to simply presenting data, nothing can send a more powerful message than a well-designed graph. For example, when a manager looks at the figures \$10,000 and \$100,000, he knows that they are very different, but when faced with a bar chart that has one line ten times longer than the other, the message simply hits home a little harder.

Take the information shown below in **Figures A** and **B**. In **Figure A**, a budget breakdown by expenditure category. Suppose that upper management wants to see this information for the upcoming budget review cycle.

**Figure A**

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Date	Amount	Department	Category	Authorized
6		\$ 8,674.54		Consulting Total	
15		\$ 19,875.78		Equipment Total	
28		\$ 178,896.82		Payroll Total	
37		\$ 10,842.42		Services Total	
40		\$ 3,824.22		Software Total	
55		\$ 3,066.44		Supplies Total	
56		\$ 225,180.22		Grand Total	

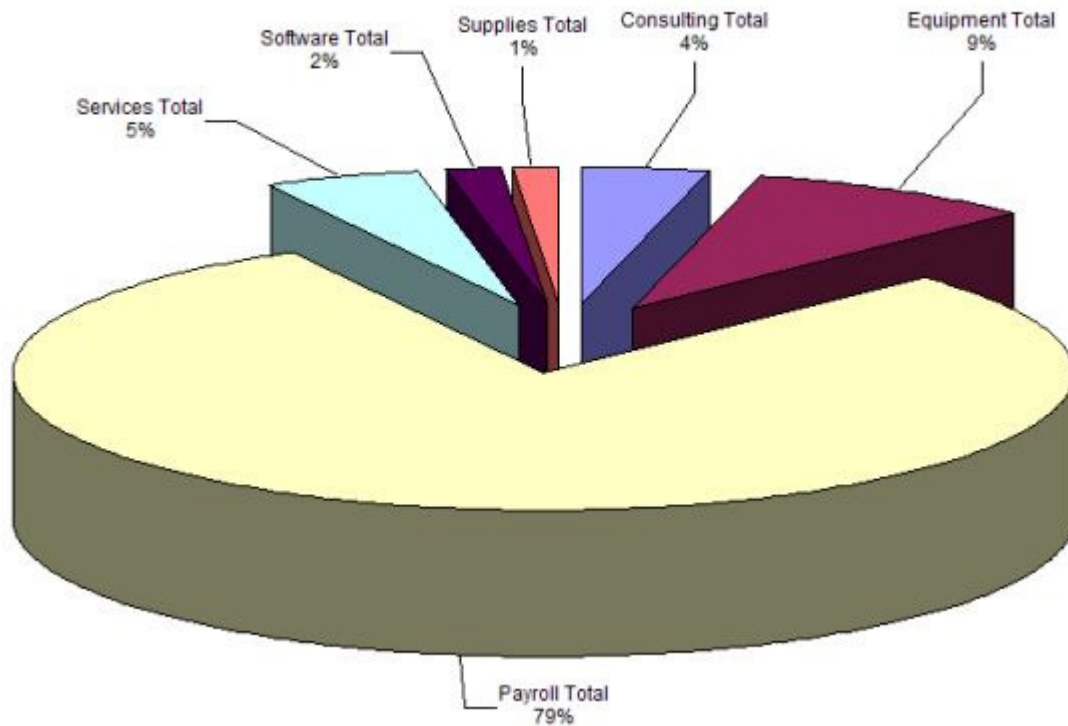
A list of budget information in a raw form. Notice the use of subtotals.

Along with a little prose, this information would easily convey what you want it to convey. But, look at **Figure B**.

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**Figure B**  
**3-month Expenditure Breakdown**



The same information, but in graph form.

The first thing that this chart screams at you is that payroll costs are a huge percentage of the budget. Beyond that, it gives you an at-a-glance look at exactly where your money is going.

In **Figure B**, we intentionally rotated the graph so that the Payroll information would be front and center. If presenting a case to senior management for reducing the salary line, this would have the best impact.

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**This is how we create a graph:**

1. Select the data, including row and column headings, that you want to appear on the graph. Omit what you don't want. You can select multiple areas by holding down the *Control key* on the keyboard while you make your selection. Alternatively, you can just start the chart wizard and provide this information as a part of that process, but I find that more cumbersome, personally.
2. Click the chart button on the Standard Toolbar (**Figure F**).
3. Select the type of graph you would like to create.
4. Follow the instructions in the rest of the graphing wizard to complete your graph.
5. Manually format your graph to provide the most impact.

**Figure F**



Use the chart button after you've selected the information you want to graph.

***If you require additional information or assistance with this item, please give us a call.***